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ABSTRACT

Asserts that educators who advocate lifelong learning too often support a narrow and arbitrary system of nomenclature, which implies that learning and thus education are terminal concepts. The need for administrative structure and socially recognized reward has plagued educators, and their clients, with learning near-sightedness. The question before the professional facilitator of lifelong learning should be: "What must be done to modify existing systems or implement new infrastructure that can more appropriately respond to lifelong learning needs of all community members?" Before a new structure can be designed, a change in thinking must come about. If we were to concentrate more on the skills desired by a lifelong learner and the relevance of the learning experience, such practices as chronological segmentation, nomenclature, and stages could be dismissed. But in order to be responsive we must consider a different structure--a new model. Community colleges are by their very nature adult educators who are positioned to serve as educational brokers. To reach the status of a true broker of lifelong learning one needs to combine the elements of citizen participation, resource utilization, and organizational partnerships along with the concept of lifelong learning. (VWC)

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The Community College's Challenge of Facilitating a New Model for Lifelong Learning

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THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S CHALLENGE OF FACILITATING A NEW MODEL FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

You haven't completed your education, nor will you ever! As long as you have breath, you will have a need to learn. These lifelong learning axioms apply to you, everyone you know, and to all residents living in a community college service area. Educators know that lifelong learning will generate life span curriculum and delivery systems (Gayle, 1990), yet educators who advocate lifelong learning too often support a narrow and arbitrary system of nomenclature which implies that learning and thus education are terminal concepts. A high school diploma, an associate or bachelor's degree, certification and licensure are but some of the terms and rewards that reinforce the notion that learning can be fragmented and that it is not continuous.

The need for administrative structure and socially recognized rewards has plagued educators, and their clients, with learning near-sightedness. When diplomas, degrees and transcripts become socially acceptable replacements for personal growth and development, a concept such as lifelong learning has a difficult time finding fertile ground. Even worse, this myopic view is taught to learners. Consequently, they soon see their education in terms of numbers of class sessions, academic semesters or the academic calendar year. Learners soon learn to go for the short term reward versus long term mastery. Thus the learner often loses the momentum, and intrinsic motivation, that is needed to become a lifelong learner.

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Instead of creating the awareness, environment and system that encourages the learner on his continuous lifelong learning journey, institutions too often reinforce the misconception that one

can complete an education at their campus. The concept that learning involves only measurable cognitive skills for "school-based" learners is also limiting. Yet some authors feel "the age of schooling is over and that a new, post-industrial learning enterprise is about to replace the infrastructure of industrial age education (Perelman, 1986)." The question before the professional facilitator of lifelong learning should be: "What must be done to modify existing systems or implement new infrastructure that can more appropriately respond to lifelong learning needs of all community members?"

Towards the Lifelong Learning Concept

Before a new structure can be designed, a change in thinking must come about. The educator must let go before attempting to grasp onto something new. One would not expect fragmented grade-level thinking (pedagogy) to be carried over into "adult" learner approaches (andragogy), but we have been and are still being conditioned to think in these terms. Have we not been taught to view adulthood as falling into Erikson's stages of psychosocial development? Historically has not the movement suggested that adults go through distinct stages complete with learning needs for each stage? The Assembly of the Ameri can Association of Community and Junior College's Bill of Rights for the Lifelong Learner states that "every American has the right to continue to learn throughout life. Every adult has the right to equal opportunity for access to relevant learning opportunities at each stage of life." In philosophy many educators have advanced beyond this concept, but in practice we are still limiting the concept of lifelong learning to adults who are in stages. Unfortunately many educators have interpreted and defined "stages" as just another word for grade levels? Such thinking leaves not room for the twenty-year-old hospice patient or

the sixty-year-old illiterate, for they do not fall in their proper developmental stage. Perhaps if we were to concentrate more on the skills desired by a lifelong learner and the relevancy of the learning experience, such practices as chronological segmentation, nomenclature, and stages could be dismissed. What is needed are new learning systems that embrace and are built upon the ideals of the lifelong learner concept. The adaptation and construction of systems that respond to the learner and not force the learner to a segmented system is more in tune with the philosophy of lifelong learning. But in order to be responsive we must consider a different structure-- a new model.

Facilitators of Learning

Early on Melby (1977) advocated that if we are to be serious about lifelong education it must include all of life, not only the later years. Education must be seen as continuous throughout life. Moreover, it must not only be schooling, it must be living and learning in home, school, community, business or profession.

This concept of the continuity of learning occurring in a variety of settings comes close to Mario D. Fantini's (1983) idea that education is a "social process." He explains that "education is a lifelong activity that takes place in a variety of settings--formal, informal, and non-formal. These settings are the environments, or contexts, for learning whether they exist in the school, the home or various community agencies." This educative environmental concept coupled with the processes and relevancy of lifelong learning clearly points to a facilitative role for the educator. For if indeed education can be seen as a leadership process that facilitates the application of resources to specific learning needs, then the educator's role is explicit. All of those

resources (individuals, agencies, schools, business/industries, geographic) that are within a community must be brought together to create a learning environment that is responsive to the individual's learning needs. And many times the best environments may be outside of the educational system's immediate sphere of influence.

Human growth and development does not neatly fit into preconceived chronological restrictions such as age, grade levels or stages. Many members of our society have accelerated or delayed learning needs based on socio-economic status, brain myelination and their immediate need more than chronological age or grade level. Therefore the turn-of-the-century concept of education based on an agrarian/industrial model must be revised to accommodate a lifelong learning system that discriminates for the learner's needs rather than on the educational systems' needs. We must "move from a school system to an educational system" (Fantini, 1983). Such a system must be life centered and lifelong in nature. Melby (1977) says it is not a question of having or not having lifelong learning; we have always had it. The question is---what kind of education is it? And how is it being delivered?

Educational Brokers

Community colleges are by their very nature adult educators who are positioned to serve as educational brokers. Who better to know the many and varied potential learning environments. Typically community colleges have a division of community services and continuing education personnel who often serve as the gate-keepers both for their host agency's access to the community and the community's access to the educational system. Because of their position,

these gatekeepers also have a broader view of learning needs than do most subject matter specialists whether those needs are academic and vocational, or involve personal or community development. Tolerance and receptivity to varing learning styles and strategies make them the closest thing to a natural facilitator for lifelong learning. Respect for each individual's learning needs and their knowledge of possible learning sites within the community compels all advocates of lifelong learning to look to these facilitators.

Whatever the individual needs, for maintenance or advancement of any of the life roles, appropriate learning environments can be planned. If this belief is acted on, a lifelong educational system that is life-centered in nature will develop. Individual goals of advancing one's potential through self-reorganization will replace such out worn concepts as grade levels and "terminal degrees." The impersonal academic delivery system can be replaced by an individualized learning service system.

But, how do you convince the people who sign your pay check that you have a legitimate role to play in the lifelong learning needs of all the community members' learning needs? This question is especially critical since this service role may or may not add to full-time-equivalency (F.T.E.) or to credit-hour production!

To reach the status of a true broker of lifelong learning one needs to combine the elements of citizen participation, resource utilization and organizational partnerships along with the concept of lifelong learning. The following implementation steps are used by successful lifelong learner

facilitators. They are:

1. Citizen Participation

An analysis of current lifelong learning needs and providers should be undertaken. This community or service area analysis should include all those educating agencies in a community who see themselves in the lifelong learning business. Consideration must be made of all non-profit agencies, schools, colleges, business training programs, and religious institutions, to name but a few of the educational providers. This analysis focuses on who is providing what learning, to which audiences, in which locations. A structured forum which allows all providers the opportunity for input can result in an up-to-date directory of lifelong learning facilitators. Additionally, clients and providers should be asked to name unmet learning needs of the individual or community. A summary of learning needs by major life concerns can be quickly compiled, and distributed.

2. Resource Utilization

Many identified needs fall outside the mission or area of responsibility of the individual agencies. These needs--both individual and community wide--largely go unserved or unnoted (Kerns and Stanley, 1982). A determination of which existing providers can most logically respond to unmet learning needs must be considered. Quite often a reallocation or sharing of existing resources can positively respond to unmet learning needs. By calling special forums for specific life concerns (e.g. health, leisure, housing) all interested providers of learning can collectively design appropriate responses.

3. Organizational Partnerships

Ports-of-entry where learners can receive expert assistance need to be established or strengthened. These well publicized ports would be at convenient locations such as public schools, colleges, human service agencies, businesses, churches, and shopping malls. A professional educator would work with each individual who comes to a port to determine the learner's need and to design an individualized learning plan. Services would include: free interest-and-ability testing, discussion of preferred learning style, intelligences, and environmental preferences, information and referral to providers of lifelong learning, on-site registration for any learning activity listing in the directory of learning, information on group study, tutors, financial aid, child care, transportation to learning sites or other assistance required of the potential lifelong learner.

This one-stop learning port would professionally match the learners' needs to available resources in a cooperative partnership arrangement. A consortium arrangement (personnel, space, financing) would replace individual extension centers and reduce duplication of services. Such partnerships will allow limited resources to be reallocated and greater numbers of clients to be served. Such an approach would elevate any community college, or other learning provider, to the status of a true facilitator of lifelong learning. No longer could an educational system be accused of providing limited training options to only a specific clientele.

In Summary

To prevent from moving backwards educators must always move forward. In this

author's opinion forward movement is towards fully implementing the lifelong learning concept. This implementation must involve the total community, consideration of all of its citizens learning needs, an assessment of all the legitimate learner providers, and the design of new models of collaboration.

Socio-cultural, structural, and economic transformations are impacting our citizens and their resulting learning needs as never before in the history. No longer can we hope to respond to those lifelong learning needs as isolated institutions of learning. A new paradigm, a new model, which is pragmatic and responsive must be developed. Who better than our community colleges to serve as the facilitators for this new and exciting challenge?